

# COMMUNITY BASED RESEARCH AND ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S HEALTH AND HEALING

A Winnipeg workshop with Kim Anderson hosted by  
Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence,  
Aboriginal Self-Governance Program  
& Institute of Urban Studies



Project #133



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Thursday March 17, 2005

Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) is one of the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health, funded by the Women's Health Contribution Program of Health Canada. The PWHCE supports new knowledge and research on women's health issues; and provides policy advice, analysis and information to governments, health organizations and non-governmental organizations. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the official policy of the PWHCE or Health Canada.

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Magnus Eliason Recreation Centre, Winnipeg**

## **Preamble**

On March 17, 2005, the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, the Aboriginal Self-Governance Program and the Institute of Urban Studies co-hosted a workshop for community and academic researchers, as well as community workers and activists, with support from the Aboriginal Self-Governance Program, the Margaret Laurence Endowment Foundation, the Institute of Urban Studies and the Women's Health Contribution Program, Health Canada. Our collaboration on this workshop is a natural extension of our mutual work and ongoing relationship, and of our affiliation with the national Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing Research Group.

Wendy Fontaine of the Aboriginal Self-Governance Program at the University of Winnipeg, Susan Mulligan of the Institute of Urban Studies of the University of Winnipeg and Margaret Haworth-Brockman and Rachel Rapaport Beck both of the Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence, all worked with guest presenter and researcher Kim Anderson to plan the workshop and set the parameters.

## **Workshop Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of this workshop was to foster connections among researchers, community members and students who are committed to advancing knowledge of Aboriginal women's health through community-based research that reflects the priorities, knowledge and world views of First Nations and Métis women in Manitoba.

The objectives were:

- to provide an opportunity for academic researchers, community researchers and community members to discuss the development of respectful research relationships,
- to explore indigenous research practices,
- to share information about recent research on Aboriginal women's health, and
- to explore some of the challenges and opportunities for future research endeavours.

## Proceedings

**A copy of the workshop agenda is provided in the Appendix.** With permission from the workshop participants, detailed notes were taken on a laptop of all that was shared around the circle and throughout the day.

### 1. Opening and Welcome

Elder, Linda McEvoy opened the workshop with a prayer.

Margaret Haworth-Brockman Executive Director of PWHCE and Wendy Fontaine of the Aboriginal Self-Governance Program welcomed the workshop participants and provided an introduction to the intent of the day. Margaret then introduced Kim Anderson.

Kim Anderson is chair of the Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing Research Group and author of *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*. She is a writer and independent consultant who has worked on health and social policy for Aboriginal organizations in Ontario. She is also the co-editor of *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival*.

Kim reflected on the success of the Saskatoon workshop of the same name which had taken place earlier, as well as other recent events related to this workshop. She noted that there is a growing recognition for this type of work and the need to bring people together to share their experiences in order to not feel isolated and to learn from one another.

Kim welcomed the participants and invited them to respond to the following questions so that the participants could begin learning and sharing with one another:

1. Research interests and work
2. What I would like to get out of the workshop
3. Questions for the day

### 2. Roundtable Introductions

There followed a round of introductions. Each person was asked to give her or his name, affiliation, and why they chose to come to the workshop, as well as to answer the above noted questions. Kim recorded main points about each person on flip chart paper so that people could be reminded for further connections and exchanges throughout the day.

Participants were university students, professors, community researchers and service providers. A majority of participants were First Nations or Métis women from various communities in Manitoba, though most were now living in Winnipeg.

Workshop participants joined us from:

Red River College  
Southern Chiefs Organization  
Aboriginal Health and Wellness Centre  
University of Winnipeg  
University of Manitoba  
Canadian Centre on Disability Studies  
Centre for Aboriginal Health  
Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs  
Mother of Red Nations  
Sexuality Education Resource Centre  
Interlake Health Services  
Aboriginal Focus Program  
Mount Carmel Clinic  
Social Planning Council of Winnipeg  
Brandon Regional Health Authority  
Aboriginal Child and Family Services  
Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence  
Institute of Urban Studies  
Aboriginal Self-Governance Program

In response to Kim's questions, participants had a wealth of knowledge to share:

1.) **Areas of interest:**

- Low-income mothers and policy needs
- Northern Manitoba Aboriginal women's health project
- Hidden homelessness in prairie cities, rooming houses
- Not sure what to do in graduate work - Women and violence, tie with conflict resolution, mental health? What it does to us
- No research – but have been involved in setting up the Ikwe shelter
- Founder of Aboriginal council, Children of the Earth high school
- Interested in upholding the values that make a good community
- Good to see valid research that I can understand that supports the work a lot of women are doing
- Student in governance
- Have studied social work – we have a lot of problems regarding violence, a lot of denial, now dealing with mental health issues
- Disability studies
- Looking to do some collaborative research
- Housing for persons with disabilities
- Assisted living housing
- Housing in remote areas
- Disability, universal design
- Social work, violence and mental health, volunteering at Social Planning Council, immigrants and housing, schools and discrimination
- Training and education funding for women to go to school

- Policy analyst, child and family agreement
- Masters of social work – family violence, sexual abuse, addictions, residential school survivors
- Project on forgiveness
- Wise women – always asking questions,
- Want to work with people with AIDS, homeless at end of life
- Teach in social work, running graduate program, interested in community-based research, child care centres, training project around centre board members
- Listening to women's stories in the communities – of violence
- Thinking about power, money, doing research with Aboriginal caregivers with children with disabilities, PhD student
- Community administrator off reserve, involved in lots of community and regional committees
- Direction for women and families, have to do more community-oriented programs to bring people back to their values, need to do action
- Family camping, success stories will get the action going, bringing the family and community together
- Recreation, cultural awareness, poverty, after school programs, inner city
- Passion to make a change for Aboriginal kids, education, how things can be done in a positive way
- Aboriginal teachings, violence
- Clinical psychology, Aboriginal mental health, found so much is what is negative in the community - wanted to focus on more positive approaches. Talked with elders
- Community-based approaches, feel alone in my work
- Policy research, counseling, survivors of abuse training program
- Chiefs want research that connects to policy
- Language and communities
- Suicide prevention, cultural continuity as a preventative
- Writing about residential school experience, how it has affected my children, grandchildren, want to turn it into something positive, look forward to tomorrow. Writing book to deal with feelings
- Cultural worker with repatriated children, the adoptees, to help them deal with their feelings of abandonment and separation
- Physical education and kinesiology
- Issues of race in sport in Canada
- Research and program evaluation, trying to use participatory approaches
- Sexuality, domestic violence, immigrant women
- Doing some work in the Island Lake area
- Interested in work that is related to identity
- Population health approach to delivering health services, requiring an organizational shift
- Native studies, women's studies
- Women's roles in government, mainstream as well as First Nations governance
- Research on any aspect affects all aspects of women's lives
- In research constantly have to "prove" it, doesn't fit culture

- Program development- should not be done in isolation from community
- Education
- Want to see solutions, positive ideas
- Allocating funding to homelessness projects, conduct research on homelessness itself.

2.) **What I would like to get out of the workshop:**

- Gathering all the wisdom in the room
- Learning from others, esp. methodologies
- Always good to be in a room full of women
- What are others doing?
- Ethics, what is it doing to us; who is being researched?
- Hope we can exchange some information on how to do this work
- Here to learn to build knowledge
- Here as a student today
- Here to learn
- Paying people in research
- Learning, networking and seeing familiar faces
- Need to take care of myself, see other women and network
- Want to connect with others, feel alone
- Have much to learn about Aboriginal women
- Interested
- Confident will leave with something I didn't have before
- Want to make connections, learn from others
- I'm perpetual learner, learn about protocols

3.) **Questions:**

- How to do research, how to present in class?
- How do you pull it off, financial side?
- All questions are burning questions
- Straddling the different roles: academia – community-based research
- How do we do research that really matters, and will have an impact on children?
- What we can do to help our youth in school system?
- And for women, so we can empower ourselves?
- How can we connect with the community to make a difference?
- As scholar, being involved in research where race and colour is the most visible, where are the women?
- How to carry out research so that people don't fear that experience, and how to make it useful?
- How can mainstream orgs work effectively, deliver health and wellness in culturally appropriate way? Is it possible? How to go about it? How to develop?
- How do you work with single women with children?
- Are we really making change?
- Why was it a man who invented mammogram machine?

### 3.) Sharing by Kim Anderson

Kim began the afternoon portion of the workshop by relaying her story and experiences, in order to lay the foundation for the small group work to come later.

She began by posing a question to the participants, which helped to structure the content of her presentation for the afternoon: "How do we do a knowledge transfer between governance structures and community?" This was a question with which she has history: she had taken it with her to university, but found that she wasn't seen as able to answer this question, due to issues of identity. At that time she decided it was for others to do, and is now reconsidering a return to this question.

Kim moved to Toronto as an adult and was socially active in literacy issues. She did policy work for the Chiefs of Ontario. It was there that she identified some of the fault lines in terms of gender; a discord between community and government. Kim completed her Master's degree at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Toronto. As part of her required coursework she took a course on qualitative research methodologies and was given as assignment requiring her to interview six individuals. She decided to use the interviews as an opportunity to do research for Aboriginal organizations. She spoke with the Executive Director at Aboriginal Family Services and received blessings to interview six clients regarding the mandate of the agency. Kim came prepared to conduct interviews on this issue, but was surprised to discover that each woman told Kim her life story, without being asked. Kim realized that the role of the life story is critical for Aboriginal women.

At that time, Kim had recently given birth to her first child and her body was telling her a story. That story being the significance of bodies, and the strength of women's bodies in childbearing. This brought her closer to the stories that she heard from the women and linked her strength to theirs – which carries her today, ten years later.

This has led to Kim's life mission: to carry women's stories and to bring them to different communities. Kim relates this role to the tradition of "travelers" in Aboriginal communities. She felt that she needed to feel a sense of hope...how can it be better for Aboriginal women and their families? How do we get to this strength: this path to magnificence? Aboriginal women's stories are missing, however we don't have to look far to find women to interview.

She started interviewing different women in her community and developed it into a thesis and eventually had it published. *A Recognition of Being* is the book that came from this work.

Relationships and responsibility are central to research involving Aboriginal women and with this, issues of ethics are critical. Going back to the original interviews, Kim knew the women and they knew her connection to the community. Therefore there was trust between Kim and the interviewees. When Kim was looking to publish her work, her publisher suggested making the book national in its scope for relevance. Word of mouth

was effective in building a network. There were gaps, i.e. Inuit and Quebec women were harder to include which is unfortunately typical in pan-Canadian work.

Kim decided to interview more women, but how, when the relationships did not exist. She had to ask the question of how to ensure the relationship building and responsibility happens. A point Kim returned to several times in her talk was the need for and use of appropriate protocols. In her own research she was constant in her attention to this despite difficulties. Most challenging were those interviews that took place over the telephone. But, nonetheless, Kim would tell her participant of how she was smudging the fax machine where the speaker phone was located.

The protocols and relationship building continued in the form of sending transcripts, editing transcripts, and sharing work before it was published. Keeping in touch and dealing with realities of Aboriginal women: moving etc was a worthwhile and challenging task, and in the end 39 of 40 women she interviewed were found and given opportunity to review and revise the words that Kim had written based upon their storytelling.

From this experience a shared goal was identified: make this a better place for Aboriginal women and girls and communities as a whole.

Once her initial research was completed, Kim began a new chapter in her life working with various organizations in Ontario helping to link research into policy and action. She helped to complete three reports on child poverty, youth sexual health and pregnancy, and food insecurity. Kim emphasized the key role of frontline workers in identifying issues and policy makers in making change by identifying gaps and using the “right language”. She sees herself as in between the frontline people – the parents, the people who work in agencies providing the care and assistance, and the leadership of the organizations. As the storyteller she helps to connect these two groups in order to make change.

How do researchers see to the responsibility associated with documenting stories that in the process build a relationship? As a storyteller Kim knows she must listen to as many stories as possible from many people. Also, key issues to consider is how the story has been told, and how will you tell it differently: value people as experts, and value process.

An example of this principle in action came from Kim's research on youth sexuality and pregnancy. Working with teens one must prepare oneself to avoid the dynamic of seeing problems. Rather, you must ask a young mother what she knows; respecting her from her perspective and making her more than the “subject” – turn it around and make her the expert and in doing so, validate her experience. Returning again to protocol and respect, Kim noted that she gives young people tobacco to recognize the knowledge that is held within each individual. Kim recommended not asking direct questions – allow the woman to tell you what she wants to tell.

Basic principles in research: What is your intent? What do you want to change? What will you give back? How will it break stereotypes, clichés etc. combat negative research? You must know what is already out there in order to change it.

In Kim is aware that there is a dynamic within Aboriginal communities of being “researched to death”. With this comes a responsibility to change the nature and purpose of research relating to Aboriginal people. Statistics Canada has responded to requests from Aboriginal communities to create data about Aboriginal children. Kim is a member of a committee for Stats Can to consult. She noted the need to look for pitfalls before beginning and advises researchers to look to content, but also to process. Can we start to document things that are unique? We must find the genius that is built into Aboriginal communities. In order to do so we must move away from measuring against “white indicators” and create questions and indicators to look at how we are doing as Aboriginal people. How we will go about gathering the data? We always must consider the ethics – consider safeguards that are or are not in place for people disclosing sensitive information.

Regarding indigenous research ethics, Kim noted that it is now an industry unto itself. We are at the very beginning of the developmental work that needs to be done. The work is coming from the community and also from Aboriginal academics saying it's not acceptable to do research without relationship and responsibility. As well these ideas are moving into political realms.

Kim reminded us that we must continue to ask many questions: What does indigenous research mean? What kind of ethical protocols will be developed? Who is driving the ethics? How is gender taken into account? She asked the group to look to OCAP, but with a critical perspective. Researchers need approval from a community for research to take place. But, consider: Ownership, Control Access and Possession – who are the gatekeepers? What type of research will be done and how will it be used? If there are mainly men in positions of authority, which questions won't be asked? (Consider incest, abuse or other gender-related questions.) How do we deal with the “machine” of ethics? Also consider the urban environment – who “owns” that information? If we aren't going to go to University ethics boards, then who do we ask for approval? Kim noted that she has been doing her own work and forming her own ethics review by talking to women elders; they have the experience and knowledge to fill this role.

Kim noted that during the roundtable many participants mentioned that they are not researchers, but she validates them as such, because if you are working with community you are seeing what is happening and asking questions to strengthen the community. Women are always asking questions in their communities. Collectively we can make change and shift organizations.

Maria Campbell, with whom Kim has learned from and collaborated with, knows a great deal about traditional protocols in that she feels one must earn the right to tell stories. Traditional story telling protocols exist, in that there were some stories that could be told

in some places and not others – i.e. responsibility and relationship as part of the oral tradition.

The weight of the work of a researcher can be difficult to bear and lonely. But there are ways to share to help validate the work – keep asking questions, especially the tough questions. The idea of the traveler is beautiful and can help to carry us and preserve our strengths in maintaining our experiences. Maria told Kim about the people in her community who passed on information and were the travelers and came every spring – everyone was happy to see them and wanted to tell them their stories too. Kim relates to this idea and sees herself in this role. In an Aboriginal language it is translated as those that stitch the community together. We can see ourselves in this way as researchers, front line workers. She encouraged the group to see themselves in this way.

## **Small Group Work**

Questions posed by Kim for small group discussions:

- What are some of the issues and challenges for you in your involvement with research?
- What skills and knowledge would you like to acquire?
- What kind of research would you like to see?
- How do we remain true to community? What do we give back?
- How do we do action- oriented research and turn research into action?
- What opportunities do we have for future collaboration?

## **Small Group Report Back on Discussion:**

- Are we going to let Chief and Council have control of research? What about individuals in the community who want to do research? Always need to be thinking about how to give back to the community; ownership.
- Research is a term that isn't understood very well. Include plain language; include connections of how research comes into being in the written report.
- Consider the role of women; sacred/traditional roles.
- How to make a difference; how to be self-motivated.
- Every skill lends itself to building community.
- Challenges and how to get community to respond - you have to find out who needs to be approached to do research.
- Time constraints with gov't funding.
- Must promote understanding and trust-building. Make action plans for recommendations into action.
- Working at grassroots – how do you know who you can work with in academia? Working within constraints of that structure (academia). Need an academic to get funding? Need to keep group like this to meet – lunch meetings to keep interest. Susan from IUS volunteered to send out an email and Kathy from AMC volunteered to host meeting. Skill building a suggested focus for the meeting.

- Discussed the issues and challenges: source of funding, connecting between academic and community. Once you have a piece of research, how do you get action into the recommendations? Is this part of research, or distinct? Lots of lip service to recommendations and no action. Male-oriented focus at the university. What do you do with research?
- So many discussions – let's not let this one die – we need to take it somewhere.
- We need to advocate change at the funding level as Aboriginal women.
- Power relations in research. Moving beyond idea of can only Aboriginal people do research with Aboriginal people? Need to consider the questions and who benefits? What do you do with research when you're done with the research? This question points to the power imbalances?
- Get together to discuss what is research. We intuitively do research. Demystify the term is an important step in order to re-arrange its component parts – empowering process.

Kim made note of ACADRE – link community projects with academic projects and act as broker. Give money to Aboriginal graduate students, building capacity. U of M – Dr. Judy Bartlett.

Kim spoke about the Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing Research Group creating a centre of excellence for Aboriginal women's health research. Networking, databases of research on Aboriginal women's health and healing and sponsoring research. No staff currently – seven individuals across the country working on it.

Part of AWHHRG's mission is demystifying research – it is ours. Make it accessible. Find different ways for women to be involved in Aboriginal women's research. Among the tasks they've set themselves: what is research? What does OCAP mean to Aboriginal women? Developing funding strategies. Visionary. Work nationally. Where is the entry point for women – who are the gatekeepers? Suggestion of having the list of participants from today to be on a list for AWHHRG.

The workshop concluded with a round asking for final thoughts and comments.

## APPENDIX I

### **Community Based Research and Aboriginal Women's Health and Healing**

A workshop hosted by

**Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence,  
Aboriginal Self-Governance Program & Institute of Urban Studies**

Thursday March 17, 2005

Magnus Eliason Rec Centre, 430 Langside Street, Winnipeg

#### **Agenda**

- 10:00 Opening prayer
- 10:15 Introductions and interests of workshop participants
- 10:45 Introduction to facilitator's research experiences
- 11:30 Break
- 11:40 Traditional protocols and gender specific approaches
- 12:30 Lunch
- 1:30 Roundtable on Aboriginal women's health and healing research in Manitoba  
(small group work)
- 2:30 Break
- 2:40 Roundtable on Aboriginal women's health and healing research in Manitoba  
(plenary session)
- 3:30 Wrap up and closing circle
- 4:00 Workshop ends

Funding for this workshop was provided by the Aboriginal Self-Governance Program,  
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